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ABSTRACT

One of five papers discussing the humanistic model used in the training of reading teachers at City College of New York, this paper explains the various community and school student placements that are used in the program. In showing how the different characteristics of the placements are useful in helping students to shape their programs and expectations, the paper illustrates how the dynamics of various teaching/learning situations are also used to shape professional skills. The paper outlines the aims of the humanistic model (which is based on the philosophy that both teachers and students need to experience what they can do as well as hypothesize what they would do) as follows: (1) to make students aware that they are professionals, (2) to encourage students' awareness of their capabilities and students' appreciation of the individual differences in their cognitive and teaching styles, (3) to sensitize students to the dynamics of interactive aspects of the teaching situation, and (4) to direct their attention to the content of instructional materials as they relate to values and to personal interests. (FL)

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THE CITY COLLEGE
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
THE READING CENTER

Strengthening Teaching Skills Through Varied Community Placements

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All reading programs regard a practical experience as an essential component of training in order for the student to put to use what has been studied in the college classroom. This can be done in different ways but usually a one-to-one tutorial situation forms the core of the practicum. The setting for this is dictated by a number of practical considerations but most often it is a university based reading clinic. Failing that, it may be a public school-based center. Our students, in the B.A/M.A. sequence, have a minimum of three separate placements, while those who go on for a professional certificate have several additional ones. Each one of these field experiences provides the opportunity for a separate set of learnings for the teacher, although they all share a set of common goals.

Within our humanistic model of teacher training, the various community placements assume special significance and are of particular importance. Why is this so? "Learning by doing", the time honored Deweyian tenet is an educational principle that we not only preach but put into practice. Because our model emphasizes the growth process of teachers and children, as distinct from the product of growth, we as instructors need the opportunity to observe first hand, to encourage, and to intervene when necessary. We teach our students that children need to experience some success in realizing their potential, not just to talk about it. And similarly, they themselves need to experience what they can do, not just hypothesize what they would do. Finally, our model, because it highlights the interaction between psychological and educational factors within instruction, perhaps more than other models, requires validation and

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proof for our students. The most conclusive and strongest demonstration that we can provide, is to have them experience, under supervision, just how this interaction occurs.

Let me describe our different field experiences. The first takes place within a school where a series of pupils from regular classes are worked with individually for a period of weeks. When our sessions must take place after schoolhours, a local YMCA program is used as a source of children. The second placement, now on an M.A. level, is in a college-based remedial reading clinic. Our college is located at the edge of an urban poverty area so that local children who attend are typical of many urban populations. We typify many city public school settings in that we lack social workers and other support services and must, therefore, require our students to take on many tasks which in a more privileged community they would not. The third setting is not remedially oriented, although it is located within a community-based after-school center. Our teachers work with a group of 5 - 8 children, using a theme-oriented approach. The site for this experience has varied but generally it is within a center where the children get other types of services, such as recreation, guidance, etc. These centers have been geographically a distance from the college and serve a different, yet basically similar population.

What are our overall goals for these placement experiences? Generally a training institution expects that a practicum experience will develop instructional skills in three major areas.

1. In learning to <u>plan and assign</u> instruction for students
2. In learning to <u>use methods</u> of instruction
3. In learning to <u>evaluate</u> the effectiveness of these teaching applications

Further, it is anticipated that the student will participate more actively in this learning experience as compared with more formal lecture situations and

that from each practicum experience the student will progressively be able to use skills in a more independent, confident fashion. In addition, however, the humanistic model combined with our urban milieu, suggests other aims.

1. We expect to make the student aware that she is a professional person. We treat her as one and expect her to act like one. If she acts in a professional fashion it is anticipated that her pupils will treat her in a similar fashion. This extends into the studentship responsibilities, as well as into the practice requirements.
2. We expect the student to become aware of her capabilities, what she can do, and what she can bring to the teaching situation. As she experiences personal growth within the teaching situation, her pupil should respond differently. We treat our students in a way which reflects respect for this development and anticipate that she will do the same for her pupils. In addition to helping to make the student aware of her own capacities, we also attempt to develop an appreciation for the range of the unique dimensions of cognitive and teaching styles which can be effective with children. We accept differences in approach in working with children, as long as they violate no basic tenets in human interaction, and we preach no single infallible way of producing instructional results. By our acceptance of teacher differences we encourage their acceptance of pupil differences.
3. We expect to make the students aware of the dynamics or interactive aspects of the teaching situation, both the personal as well as the environmental aspects. We attempt to sensitize them to be responsive to the here and now of the instructional situation and how this modifies planning, method, and evaluation. This includes a sensitivity to our urban setting as well as to the personal dynamics of teacher-

pupil relationship. Attitudes towards school and towards homework are considered essential to contributing towards an understanding of what happens in the tutorial situation.

4. We expect to make the student aware of the content of the instructional materials and how these impact upon the child with regard to values as well as to personal interests. This should direct her away from being bound to method as distinct from content.

If these are our goals for all our community placements, how do we specifically carry them out in each of the settings?

1. In our first placement, which takes place in the junior year of undergraduate education, the student is formally introduced to the concept of professionalism. She is expected to be available for her instructional period with her child at the time set and expected to be prepared. If she is not she will miss out on the teaching module. She must bring most of her own teaching material, although the basics are provided. She writes a short summary for the child's teacher, often with great uneasiness; language and writing style are monitored by the college instructor. Most students use their first names with the children, not yet believing that they are really in a teaching role and are ready to be called Ms. or Mr. Most students cannot get beyond this point for this dimension of role definition.

It is, however, in her growing awareness of her own skills and capabilities that the student specifically experiences more dramatic progress at this stage. She actually carries out some reading instruction according to a plan, rather than merely reading with the child. She is encouraged to use her own experiences for book selection and in holiday presentations. She is sensitized to the quality of the personal interaction with her pupil and how her actions cause reactions. Frequently our students have similar backgrounds as the pu-

pils, allowing for special empathy and understanding. Students are encouraged to trust themselves with regard to selection of materials, but they must learn that a ten year old's concerns are not the same as the college student's. She must learn to distinguish materials which are appropriate and which are descriptive of universal human experiences. She is encouraged to use urban settings to enhance learning, often showing herself to be ignorant of the city's potential. The course evaluations attest to the student's recognition that they have begun to feel surer about themselves, that they now have some skills under their belts, and that they are experiencing themselves as growing.

For the first placement, the student has learned about planning, though done little herself; she has attempted to use instructional methods with a single child; and she has learned about evaluation, making some effort to use this with her child.

2. For the second placement, the professional aspects of the reading training come to the fore. The student is treated as a professional with regards to handling parents, the child's school, and the child's records. She learns to write reports. She must function without receiving grades on her work, rather working with the instructor towards achieving a standard of competence. She learns to use standardized testing procedures, to evaluate progress of the child and the effectiveness of her own instruction. She is introduced to the professional reading association and the employment possibilities that derive from clinical work. This practicum, while it has implications for the student's sense of her own potential, is less concerned with these awakenings but rather with her identification with the professional role.

It is also concerned with personal interaction between teacher and child. The teacher learns to modify her reading plans to adapt to the child's work style; curriculum cannot proceed according to her plan (or to a teaching guide) without attention to her child's responses. She needs to learn to use herself with the child, first to help him to learn and then to encourage him to learn for himself.

The content assumes great importance, as an expression of attention to the personal interaction between child and teacher. Again it is the child's interests which will probably dictate content, but the teacher will use content for helping the child to identify and recognize values which emphasize his dignity and potentiality for growth. For example, New Practice Readers and McCall-Crabbe exercises, etc, need to be carefully chosen not only for level of difficulty but as they relate to content which has meaning and interest. A wide range of instructional material must be available to help the student in her selection.

The second placement fulfilled our goals most strongly in the area of both learning to plan and actually doing the planning. It continues to provide opportunities where different instructional methods are tried out with the single child and where evaluation of this teaching takes place both formally and informally.

The third field placement, which is a group teaching situation, pushes the student to reach within herself for knowledge and insights from many parts of her own life. She must design and carry out a teaching project, without access to formal curriculum, formal materials, or to formal tests, which will involve language arts practice, appropriate to each child's needs and within each child's sphere of interest. She must be in tune with the children according to their developmental levels, their specific interests, their cognitive styles, and reading needs. She has support and direction from the instructor but must call on her own resources for content and her own instructional style for organization and presentation. Her planning is a delicate balance between children's interests and teachers' interests. If she cannot motivate the children the project cannot be successful. The aspects of our instructional goals which involve interaction come to the fore. The student who has accumulated formal knowledge about how to teach reading must now risk her ability to motivate, using this in a group situation. She has great lattitude and may choose projects ranging from song

sheets to cookbooks, from kite making kits to dramas, but she must satisfy not only herself but the children. And she must self appraise.

This can be an exhausting, yet exhilerating learning experience. The student plans, teaches, evaluates progress and her own performance. She has enlarged her view of the professional role (sometimes our students who hitherto have viewed the classroom as the only avenue for exercise of their skills stay on at the community centers as workers), she has experienced herself as being able to use many areas of competence, she has learned to use content in a variety of ways, and has been sensitized to personal and environmental forces which influence instruction. These learnings have not occurred in a classroom at the college. However, I do not think they could have occurred without the college. Rather they occurred within an educational design which had a humanistic base.